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THE IDEA OF EQUALITY

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PART I

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The reader of the *Syntopicon* will note that equality is not one of the *102 Great Ideas*. This omission may derive entirely from the degree of arbitrariness that admittedly is involved in constructing such a list¹. But there are also other possible reasons, and they are worth considering for the light they throw upon equality, which in some ways is a strange and difficult idea.

“Equality” appears in the INVENTORY OF TERMS and there receives a double entry, as follows:

Equality (*math.*): see QUANTITY 1b; SAME AND OTHER 3d
Equality and inequality (*pol.*): see DEMOCRACY 4a-4a(2); JUSTICE 5;
TYRANNY 5a/see also CITIZEN 2c-3; LABOR 7c(2); LIBERTY 1f; LOVE 4a;
REVOLUTION 3a

The fact that the term receives two entries indicates one of the curious features about the discussion of equality. There has always been a suspicion, and it is a suspicion that still exists, that equality as applied to things human is at best a derivative idea and that its primary place lies in the mathematical order; and hence, too, that carrying it over into social and political discussion may be to some extent illicit, confusing, and metaphorical in no helpful way.

The fact, too, that the *Inventory* sends the reader to a number of different chapters to find discussions of equality may suggest that equality is a subordinate or subsidiary idea that does service under a larger, more complex, and genuinely “great” idea. One might infer that most of its intellectual substance was expended in its contribution to the idea of justice or of democracy.

Still another possible reason why it failed to make the list of 102 ideas may be the fact that it is what might be called a historically delayed idea; that is, an idea that was late in coming to have an impact on human history and for that reason also late in becoming a subject of major discussion and dispute in our intellectual tradition.

This last reason is perhaps the most interesting one. Alexis de Tocqueville strongly maintained that equality as a social and political ideal is a peculiarly modern idea. It was “the novel object” that he discovered on coming to America in the early days of the republic to study the nature and effects of democracy. He asserted that equality was the “primary fact . . . the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived and the central point at which all . . . observations constantly terminated.”²

Since the time of Tocqueville the idea of equality has certainly come into its own. It is a fundamental ideal of democracy and the central moral term in the Socialist tradition, in both its Marxist and non-Marxist forms. It is strongly involved in our gravest international issues: those that arise from the inequality between the great and the many new small powers; and especially the great and scandalous inequality, as regards the conditions for a decent human life, between the northern and southern hemispheres of our earth.

While Tocqueville emphasized that equality is a peculiarly modern idea, he also pointed out that it has roots deep in the past. He called upon the men of his time to recognize that “the gradual and progressive development of social equality is at once the past and the future of their history...”³ It is likewise true of the philosophical controversy about equality that it too has its roots deep in the past, although only in the modern world has it come to have a major place.

We will accordingly begin our analysis with a brief review of the past of the controversy. For that purpose we will consider what *Great Books of the Western World* have to say about equality. From this review we obtain some insight into the major issues and at the same time develop the terminology—the grammar, one might say—needed for analyzing the discussion of equality. We will then turn to review the contemporary literature on the subject. The discussion is complex and often confusing. Space will prevent consideration of all of even the major issues in the discussion. We will focus our attention on two only: the generic notion of equality, and the question of the justification of the principle of equal treatment.

EQUALITY IN GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Equality, as a social and political ideal for all men, is admittedly a feature of our modern world. In the ancient world inequality was both the ideal and the fact. Such major opposites as Greek- Barbarian, Spartan-Helot, Roman-non-Roman, freeman-slave, all point to deep and important inequalities. Yet it is also a fact that the ancient Greeks, at a certain social and political level, were greatly concerned with equality, as is shown by the extensive vocabulary of “equality-words” that they developed. The more important ones are the following:

isonomia: equality before the law *isotimia*: equality of honor

isopoliteia: equality of political rights

isokratia: equality of political power

isopsephia: equality of votes or suffrage

isegoria: equality in right to speak

isoteleia: equality of tax or tribute

isomoiria: equality of shares or partnership

isokleria: equality of property

isodaimonia: equality of fortune

The English translations of the Greek are rough and too short to give any but the slightest indication of the force of the original. Yet they are clear enough to enable us to make several important distinctions about equality.

We note in the first place that all are equalities of traits that men possess in virtue of their involvement in and with the society of their fellow men. They are traits that one has as part of one’s social environment as distinguished from what is part of one’s person. Political power, for example, is a different kind of trait or characteristic from physical height, even though, as Herodotus reported, men sometimes obtain political power because of their height⁴. Yet with respect to both characteristics, we may compare two men and judge them equal or unequal in political power or in height.

In these two attributions of equality we are dealing with different ways in which equality may be possessed. The traits or features that we compare in respect of equality or inequality may be inherent in the person, as height is; or they may be a condition that one has as a result of his place in society, such as political power. We will accordingly use the phrase “personal equality” for equalities of the first sort and “conditional equality” for those of the second.

Of course, the same distinction holds for inequalities. But it is tedious and unnecessary to repeat “inequality” every time we use “equality.” Henceforth, we will assume that the distinctions that we find necessary for the analysis of equality also hold for inequality, unless we explicitly assert the contrary.

All the equalities referred to by the Greek lexicon set forth above are conditional equalities. Each consists in an equality of condition in some respect. Some, however, are of such a sort as to admit of degrees, whereas others do not. All citizens, for example, are equal as citizens and have equal political rights (*isopoliteia*). But not all citizens have equal political power (*isokratia*). The President is no more a citizen than an ordinary voter is, yet he obviously possesses much greater power.

This example reveals still another distinction among equalities. It is the distinction between what we will call a *difference of degree* and a *difference of type*. In the one case, men are equal or unequal with respect to a trait, such as political power, that may be possessed in varying degrees. In the other case, there is no question of degree but merely of the presence or absence of a trait, such as citizenship.

In making judgments about equality, we may sometimes combine the two kinds into a still more complex judgment. A political officeholder and a citizen who does not hold office are unequal, their inequality being based on a difference of type. The President and a congressman are equal inasmuch as both are officeholders. Yet they are greatly unequal with respect to the political power they possess. Neither is more nor less an officeholder than the other, but one does have much more power.

Still another difference among the various conditional equalities lies in the fact that they belong to different orders of our life in society, to the different institutions by which we arrange and order our relations with each other. Thus, we distinguish between our legal, social, political, and economic interests and institutions. Although no hard and fast line separates one from another, we do dis-

tinguish such orders and speak of legal equality, social equality, political equality, and economic equality. Our Greek lexicon of equalities can be arranged accordingly.

One equality that we do not find named in the Greek lexicon is equality of opportunity. This is a conditional equality in that opportunity is not part of our person but a condition of our environment. Yet it seems markedly different from other conditional equalities, since it does not consist in any particular institutional recognition of status, as legal equality does, for example. Equality of opportunity is a vaguer notion than the equalities of status. As we shall see, it is also a modern notion, one that the Greeks had no word for because they did not conceive of it as a possibility.

So far, we have yet to meet an issue about equality upon which men take different and opposed positions. Yet all along the greatest issue about equality, at least in the ancient world, has been implicit. It appears the moment we ask who is supposed to be equal in honor, political rights and power, and in the other various conditional equalities. No ancient Greek would ever have thought of demanding them for all men. He would have taken it for granted that such equalities were the prerogative only of freemen and of Greeks. In other words, it was never seriously doubted that inequality should be the rule in relations between Greeks and barbarians, between citizens and noncitizens, and between freemen and slaves.

Inequality and Slavery

The central issue with regard to equality in the ancient world was, without doubt, the institution of slavery. As Rousseau remarked, slavery constitutes “the last degree of inequality.”⁵ The ancient controversy concerned the cause and justification of that great inequality. Although the discussion is neither especially obscure nor difficult, it is complex. At the start, then, it may be helpful to indicate schematically the various positions that were taken.

First is the position that some men are slaves by nature. The theory behind this position maintains that men are radically unequal in type and that the inferior are meant by nature to be the slaves of others. To treat some men as slaves and others as free is justified on the ground that some men are in fact slaves while others are not. Unequal treatment is based on what is claimed to be an inequality in fact.

The second position asserts that all men are by nature equal and, hence, denies that there are any men who are by nature slaves. Yet it does not denounce all slavery as unjust and call for its abolition. While asserting the natural equality of men, it still permits radically unequal treatment by accepting conventional or legal slavery. If some men are the slaves of others, that condition is the result of human and social institutions and not of nature.

The third position, and the last that need be distinguished here, is the one that not only asserts the natural equality of all men but, on the basis of it, also argues that any form of slavery is intrinsically unjust.

The first and third positions are the clearest and most definite. The second, at least to us now, is logically weaker and harder to justify. Yet, as is so often the case in social and political affairs, the logically weaker doctrine long held the dominant position.

Whatever the error, or evil, in the practical order of their civilization, it was typical of the Greeks that they clearly recognized and faced the issue in the theoretical order. Aristotle both took a definite position and argued for its rightness; he also discerned the structure of a position opposed to his. He is the prime exponent of our first position, the doctrine of natural slavery.

Aristotle defined a slave as one “who is by nature not his own but another man’s, ... who, being a human being, is also a possession... an instrument of action, separable from the possessor.”⁶ Then he asked, “is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right . . .?” He declared at once: “There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”⁷ The mark of it lies in the difference between the bodies and souls of slaves and freemen. “When then there is such a difference,” he wrote, “as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. For he who can be, and therefore is, another’s, and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature. Whereas the lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle; they obey their instincts. And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their

bodies minister to the needs of life.” “It is clear, then,” Aristotle concluded, “that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.”⁸

Some men are by nature slaves; therefore, they should be treated as slaves, and to treat them otherwise would be unjust. This conclusion follows only if we assume, with Aristotle, that unequals should be treated unequally. Although it is not stated in so many words in the text just quoted, he did assert this principle explicitly, when he wrote: “For equals the honourable and the just consist in sharing alike, as is just and equal. But that the unequal should be given to equals, and the unlike to those who are like, is contrary to nature, and nothing which is contrary to nature is good.”⁹

Aristotle also reported the position that is most strongly opposed to his doctrine of natural slavery. “Others affirm,” he wrote, “that the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature, and that the distinction between slave and freeman exists by law only, and not by nature; and being an interference with nature is therefore unjust.”¹⁰ This last clause would appear to entail the abolition of slavery, since, presumably, what is unjust should not be allowed to continue. This conclusion, however, was seldom, if ever, drawn in antiquity. The more common position was the one taken by both the Stoics and the Christians, which asserts the natural equality of men without condemning legal, or conventional, slavery as unjust.

Cicero voiced the common Stoic doctrine when he wrote, in *The Laws*, that “there is no one thing so like or so equal to another as in every instance man is to man. And if the corruption of customs, and the variation of opinions, did not induce an imbecility of minds and turn them aside from the course of nature, no one would more nearly resemble himself than all men would resemble all men. Therefore, whatever definition we give of man will be applicable to the whole human race. And this is a good argument that there is no dissimilarity of kind among men; because if this were the case, one definition could not include all men.”¹¹ The position of the early Christians was expressed by Jesus, when He said all men are brothers under one heavenly Father, and by St. Paul, when he declared: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus¹².

No one could ask for stronger and more forthright expressions of the unity and equality of mankind. Yet neither Cicero nor St. Paul argued from this that there should be no slavery because it is con-

trary to nature and unjust. Aristotle had argued from the fact of inequality to the justice of unequal treatment. But they did not argue from the fact of equality to the need for equal treatment. They accepted slavery without question. Of course, it was not for them natural, but a convention made by men and sanctioned by law. It could not be justified, as Aristotle claimed, by an appeal to nature but would have to be justified, as any other convention or law, by appeal to its need and utility for the social good. Presumably they held, because of their view of the technical and economic impossibilities, that the slavery of some was the price that had to be paid for civilization.

In a statement surprising for its anticipation of the future, Aristotle for a moment seemed to see a way out of slavery. "If every instrument could accomplish its own work," he wrote, "obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, ... if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves."¹³ In this forecast of our automated technological society, Aristotle saw the conditions under which slavery would become unnecessary. Yet in the next sentence he withdrew from even this remote possibility by noting that a slave is needed not only for producing useful goods, but also for service in the household, where there is no question of production. For Aristotle, as for almost everyone else during the next two thousand years, a civilized life without slavery was practically inconceivable.

Many centuries had to pass before it became easy to deny that slavery has any basis whatsoever; in other words that, all men being equal, none should be treated as slaves. Rousseau gave strong expression to this position, some twenty-two centuries after Aristotle. He charged Aristotle, in effect, with mistaking the results of treatment for those of nature. Aristotle saw that slaves differed from freemen in bodily structure and behavior and concluded that nature was the cause. Rousseau accused him of failing to appreciate "how far even the natural inequalities of mankind are from having that reality and influence" which he supposed. According to Rousseau's statement: "It is in fact easy to see that many of the differences which distinguish men are merely the effect of habit and the different methods of life men adopt in society." In effect, he turned Aristotle's argument completely around: if a slave has the body of a slave and behaves as a slave, it is because he has been treated as a slave¹⁴.

From this brief review of the arguments about slavery we can obtain several more distinctions bearing on equality. The first is the distinction between *specific* and *nonspecific* equality. Not even Aristotle denied that slaves are men; in fact, the difficulty with his doctrine of natural slavery is that he wanted to maintain that slaves are men and yet could justly be treated as though they were not men but merely living tools. For him, all men are not, as men, equal in worth, whereas for the Stoics and Christians they are.

Different views about the origin or basis of slavery yield another distinction that also applies to equality. Some traits we have are natural; they are traits we are born with, whether innate or congenital. Other traits are acquired, or imposed upon us, during the course of our development. We can accordingly speak of *natural* or *acquired* equalities or inequalities, meaning thereby that the trait with respect to which men are judged to be equal or unequal is either natural or acquired. The looks, abilities, and behavior of a slave are natural inferiorities according to Aristotle, whereas according to Rousseau they are acquired as a result of the way he is treated.

The argument over slavery also reveals the need for distinguishing between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* statements involving equality. The descriptive statement, like Aristotle's assertion about natural slaves, aims to describe a factual condition. The inequality between the slave and the freeman in ability is held to be as much a matter of fact as their inequality in height. The prescriptive statement makes a practical demand and asserts a moral or social claim for a certain kind of regard or action, as in the statement that A and B should be given equal shares. Aristotle, as we have seen, makes a descriptive statement the basis or warrant for the prescriptive demand: Some men are by nature slaves and, therefore, they should be treated as slaves.

Political Uses of Equality

So far, it is the idea of *inequality*, not equality, that has been uppermost. We turn now to consider the development of the idea of *equality*. That development is most readily seen from the political uses to which equality comes to be put. It functions as a basic premise in the arguments for the political development that runs from constitutionalism through democracy to socialism.

The first assertions of the natural equality of men as men were made, as we have seen, without any political implications at all. Both Cicero and St. Paul asserted equality, without using it to ar-

gue for the abolition of slavery and certainly not to advance the cause of democracy. Yet when equality did become important in political discussion—and that seems to occur first, in any systematic way, with the social contract theorists—it did so at a fundamental and early place in the arguments. Although Hobbes and Locke reached opposed conclusions regarding the right political regime—and that by itself is of great interest in the development of the idea of equality—it must first be noted that they both agreed in making assertions about equality early and in controlling premises in their political philosophies.

Both writers asserted the natural equality of all men by proposing the hypothesis of what men would be like in a “state of nature” without subjection to any kind of political rule or government. According to Hobbes, “Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, . . . And as to the faculties of the mind, . . . I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength. For prudence is but experience, which equal time equally bestows on all men in those things they equally apply themselves unto... From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends.”¹⁵

For Locke, the state of nature is “a state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another, there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another, without subordination or subjection.”¹⁶ This equality is “that equal right that every man hath to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man.” Such equality, he held, is not inconsistent with many inequalities: “Age or virtue may give men a just precedency. Excellency of parts and merit may place others above the common level. Birth may subject some, and alliance or benefits others, to pay an observance to those to whom Nature, gratitude, or other respects, may have made it due.”¹⁷

Thus both Hobbes and Locke would have subscribed, although in different ways, to the proposition that all men are equal by nature. They made very different political uses of it, however. For Hobbes,

this equality of nature amounts to an equality of weakness which makes necessary an absolute government; whereas, for Locke, it is an equality in freedom which leads to a limited or constitutional government.

In Locke's own thinking equality could hardly be said to be democratic. Legal and political equality should be enjoyed only by the few who are privileged to be citizens; they are not rights of all. Yet just as equality could be used to argue for constitutionalism, so too it could be called upon to advance the cause of democracy. Because men are equally free and able to govern themselves, government must be responsible as well as limited: responsible and accountable, so that the governed may make effective judgments about the way they are governed; and limited, lest government infringe upon and deny the fundamental freedom of man.

The *Declaration of Independence* reveals the democratic use of equality, provided its words are read as a pledge to the future. First, in declaring that "all men are created equal," it asserted the natural equality of all men. Second, it called for a basic equality of treatment in asserting that all men are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights," among which are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

In practice, however, the recognition of equal rights fell far short of universality. Nothing shows this more strikingly—more scandalously, we would now say—than the clause in the *Constitution* specifying the basis for political representation: it "shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons."¹⁸ Here, in words for anyone to read, it was claimed that some men do not count, politically, as men at all, while others amount to only three-fifths of a man.

Kant, also, vigorously asserted the specific equality of all men but then set a limit to the extent to which it should find expression in political equality. "There is," he wrote, "... an innate equality belonging to every man which consists in his right to be independent of being bound by others to anything more than that to which he may also reciprocally bind them. It is, consequently, the inborn quality of every man in virtue of which he ought to be *his own master by right*."¹⁹ Being one's own master would seem to call for political equality, or the right to have, at least, some say about how one is governed. Kant recognized such a right— "civil equality,"

he called it—and, although he allowed it much scope, he finally qualified it by calling for a limitation on suffrage.

He drew a distinction between “*active* and *passive* citizenship” according as one is or is not economically independent. As examples of the economically dependent, he cited “the apprentice of a merchant or tradesman, a servant who is not in the employ of the state, a minor (*naturaliter vel civiliter*), all women, and, generally, every one who is compelled to maintain himself not according to his own industry, but as it is arranged by others . . .” Such persons, being dependent on the will of others, are unequal to them, hence “not equally qualified to exercise the right of suffrage under the constitution, and to be full citizens . . .” For this reason, Kant wanted to deny them the vote, although he added the proviso that the laws must make it “possible for them to raise themselves from this passive condition in the state to the condition of active citizenship.”²⁰ He apparently conceived the condition as not a permanent one for all who are in it.

The Kantian position reflects vividly the adventures that the idea of equality had in the past as well as its future developments. In making the condition of economic dependency a disqualification for active citizenship, he transposed, as it were, the structure of a natural slavery doctrine into the conventional and conditional order. But in implying that such a condition is not necessarily a permanent one, he raised the critical question regarding the alterability or inalterability of that condition of economic dependency.

In *Great Books of the Western World* concern for the full import of specific equality first finds expression in the work of John Stuart Mill. He expressly identified equality with “the principle of democracy,” and in the name of justice demanded equal suffrage for all. “There ought to be no pariahs in a full-grown and civilized nation,” he wrote. “There is not equal suffrage where every single individual does not count for as much as any other single individual in the community.”²¹ And where there is not equal suffrage there is injustice: “it is a personal injustice to withhold from any one, unless for the prevention of greater evils, the ordinary privilege of having his voice reckoned in the disposal of affairs in which he has the same interest as other people.”²² Hence Mill opposed any “limitation of the suffrage, involving the compulsory exclusion of any portion of the citizens from a voice in the representation.”

The basic reason underlying this demand for political equality would seem to rest, for Mill, on the equal right of all to happiness and its means—political status being understood as one of the

means. In *Utilitarianism*, he maintained that “one person’s happiness, supposed equal in degree (with the proper allowance made for kind), is [to be] counted for exactly as much as another’s.” Consequently, everyone has an equal claim to happiness: “everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one.” This equal claim to happiness “involves an equal claim to all the means of happiness,” from which Mill then concluded that “all persons are deemed to have a *right* to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse. And hence all social inequalities, which have ceased to be considered expedient, assume the character not of simple inexpediency, but of injustice, and appear so tyrannical, that people are apt to wonder how they ever could have been tolerated;”²³

Mill put certain limitations on universal suffrage, but he maintained that these “do not conflict with this principle.” One is literacy, including a command of arithmetic, but such “elementary acquirements” must be within the reach of everyone: “universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement.” Some echo of Kant’s position appears in his demand that “the receipt of parish relief should be a peremptory disqualification for the franchise. He who cannot by his labour suffice for his own support has no claim to the privilege of helping himself to the money of others.”²⁴ Mill also recommended another inequality in suffrage. On the ground that “the judgment of the higher moral or intellectual being is worth more than that of the inferior,” he argued that it has “a claim to superior weight.” He accordingly proposed that the vote of the more highly educated should be given greater weight than others²⁵.

The persistence, even in Mill, of economic dependency as a basis for unequal juridical and political treatment makes it clear— at least in retrospect—why the next stage in the development concerned the alterability of conditions that allowed any man to be in a crippling dependency upon another man. Mill’s exclusion of those on relief shows clearly why Socialist writers were led to criticize and condemn “bourgeois equality” and to call for much more far-reaching equalities. In his book *Anti-Dühring*, Engels claimed that there is a “proletarian demand for equality,” which builds upon the “bourgeois demand,” but goes far beyond it: “Equality must not be merely apparent, must not apply merely to the sphere of the state, but must also be real, must be extended to the social and economic sphere.” Such has been the constant demand of all the various Socialist parties. Engels went on to a characteristic Communist position when he then declared that “the real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the abolition of classes. Any


demand for equality which goes beyond that, of necessity, passes into absurdity.”²⁶

Beneath the ideological talk about “bourgeois” and “proletarian” demands is the just observation that equality in law and in fact can be far removed from one another. Anatole France, and later R. H. Tawney, stressed the irony of legal equality by itself. The poor as well as the rich are equally entitled to dine at the Ritz or to sleep under the bridge; but only the rich can afford the one and only the poor are ever compelled to the latter. Legal equality—the right to sue for justice—is merely formal, nominal only, if one does not also possess the means and powers to exercise that right. The possession of one right, say legal equality, may presuppose a prior equality of another kind, in this case the minimal economic equality of those able to afford the cost of going to court.

In concluding this survey of what the *Great Book* authors have had to say about equality, it is worth considering Mill’s expression of wonder that inequalities should have been tolerated for so long. The pattern of all the arguments for equality of treatment that we have considered so far has been the same: it consists in an assertion of fundamental equality among men that is then made the basis of the demand for equality of treatment in some respect. Yet, as we have seen, the fundamental specific equality of men was asserted long before it was followed up with the demand for even the abolition of slavery, let alone for such political equalities as were proposed in constitutionalism, democracy, and socialism.

It was easy for Rousseau, Mill, Engels, and for many more in their time to make such demands; it is easier still for us to advance them in the twentieth century. But why was it so difficult, if not impossible, for Cicero and St. Paul? Perhaps John Plamenatz provides an answer when he writes: “The ardor for equality of rights which led to revolution in France and to reform in England was not born of men’s at last discovering that they were by nature less unequal than they had hitherto supposed, or that social distinctions bore too little relation to differences of character and talent.” As we have seen, Cicero, St. Paul, Hobbes, and Locke held this much. “It came, above all, from the belief that men could by their own efforts change and improve their political and social environment. It is this belief, this faith, which sets thinkers like the Encyclopaedists in France and the Philosophical Radicals in England apart from the great majority of political and social theorists before them. They were egalitarians because they were optimists. But their optimism did not consist in their asserting human equality in a sense denied before them; in their saying that all men have cer-

tain inalienable rights, or that one man's happiness must count for as much as another's, or that every man is apt to be a better judge than other people of his own interest. All this had been said long before they said it. Their optimism consisted in their belief that a great deal could be done, here and now, to improve the lot of all classes in society."²⁷

In other words, what is new and provides an entirely different stage for the discussion of equality is the opening up of possibilities never before envisioned. Extreme inequalities in all orders were accepted and tolerated because they were thought to be unalterable conditions of civilized life. Even if in theory they were alterable—witness the pictures of a golden age of equality in the past—it was thought that they were not alterable in practice. If not slavery, then at least gross inequality in status and education and labor was taken to be the price of civilization. By the nineteenth century, however, at least in the Western world, opportunities were discovered that had never been dreamed of before. The unalterable conditions accepted for centuries were found to be alterable. Equalities of all kinds and in all orders came to be demanded for all men, not just for the privileged few. Equality became a controlling political and social ideal. 

NOTES

1 See the essay on the construction of the *Syntopicon*, GBWW, Vol. 3, p. 1223.

2 *Democracy in America* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1945), Vol. I, p. 3.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

4 *The History* III. 20; GBWW, Vol. 6, p. 93C.

5 *On the Origin of Inequality*, 2nd Part; GBWW, Vol. 38, p. 359d.

6 *Politics*, 1254a14; GBWW, Vol. 9, p. 447c.

7 *Ibid.*, 1254a18; p. 447d.

8 *Ibid.* 1254b16, p. 448b-c.

9 *Ibid.* 1325b7; p. 529c. Cf. 1280a10; p. 477c.

10 *Ibid.*, 1253b20; p. 447a.

11 *De legibus* I. 10, 28.

12 *Matthew*, 23:8-9; *Galatians*, 3:28. Cf. *I Corinthians*, 12:13; *Colossians*, 3:11.

13 *Politics*, 1253b34; *GBWW*, Vol. 9, p. 447b-c.

14 *On the Origin of Inequality*, 1st Part; *GBWW*, Vol. 38, p. 347a-

d.

15 *Leviathan*, chap. xiii; *GBWW*, Vol. 23, p. 84c-d.

16 *Treatise of Civil Government* II. ii. 4; *GBWW*, Vol. 35, p. 24d.

17 *Ibid.*, II. vi. 54; p. 36c.

18 *Constitution of the United States*, Art. 1, Sect. 2; *GBWW*, Vol. 43, p. 11b.

19 *The Science of Right*, Intro.; *GBWW*, Vol. 42, p. 401c.

20 *Ibid.*, 2nd Part, 46, p. 437a-c.

21 *Representative Government*, chap. viii; *GBWW*, Vol. 43, p. 382b; & chap. vii; p. 307d.

22 *Ibid.*, chap. viii, pp. 382b, 381b.

23 *Utilitarianism*, chap. v; *GBWW*, Vol. 43, p. 475b-c.

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25 *Ibid.*, p. 384c-d.

26 *Anti-Dühring* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), pp.

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27 *Man and Society* (London: Longmans, 1963), Vol. II, pp. 24-25.

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